

Michigan United Conservation Clubs

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P.O. Box 30235

2101 Wood Street

Lansing, MI 48909-7735

Phone: 517/371-1041

FAX: 517/371-1505



House Tourism and Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources Committee

Thursday, December 03, 2009

Testimony of Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC)

Re: HB 5380 (H-3) and (H-4)

Mr. Chair and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing MUCC the opportunity to comment on House Bill 5380.

MUCC fully supports the H-3 version of HB 5380.

We believe the intent of this section of statute is to give the Natural Resources Commission full authority to regulate the feeding of deer and elk according to sound-scientific principles. We support extending the sunset, or even eliminating it all together, so that our resources could be managed in an effective and transparent manner, with input from biologists.

Deer hunting alone is a half-billion dollar industry in this state and an outdoor tradition enjoyed by more than 700,000 residents. Because deer are an integral part of Michigan's ecosystem and economy, the conveyance of disease among deer, other wildlife, and humans should not be taken lightly. Just like baiting, deer and elk feeding congregates animals in a manner that increases the risk of spreading diseases. MUCC's voting delegation confirmed their support for a ban to all baiting and feeding in the Lower Peninsula back in 2003, and reaffirmed it again in 2007 statewide. I have attached these resolutions.

Regarding the H-4 substitute presented, limiting a feeding ban to only a county and the surrounding counties where an infected animal is found does not address the issue that was at the crux of the 2008 ban: captive cervids. A peninsula-wide ban was necessary because captive cervids, unlike wild cervids, have a (human-assisted) range of hundreds and even thousands of miles because of the breeding, selling, and exchanges that happens among the cervid farms, breeding facilities, and private hunting ranches. We know now that of the 460 captive cervid operations remaining in Michigan, more than 200 are not in compliance with their disease testing or fencing regulations. If there is a disease issue and an incidental (or intentional) release among one of these 200+ farms, our entire wild deer herd statewide is still at risk.

In addition, limiting a feeding ban to up to 18 months also flies in the face of science. Biologists know that there is a scientifically significant number of wild deer that must be tested in order to validate that there is no detectable trace of disease among the population. Hunting is the primary means for harvesting deer to test, and 18 months may only span one hunting season. This is a snapshot in time and is not enough time to effectively collect and analyze the number of samples necessary to determine there is not a disease concern.

DEER BAITING [REAFFIRMS BAN STATEWIDE] (2007)

WHEREAS, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) passed a resolution at its 2000 annual convention asking for a complete ban on the practice of deer baiting and feeding in the lower peninsula – effectively putting MUCC on record as opposing deer feeding and baiting in the Lower Peninsula; and

WHEREAS, since this resolution passed in 2000, the state of Wisconsin has discovered Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in its free ranging whitetail herd; and

WHEREAS, Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP) shares a border with Wisconsin and a deer wandering Wisconsin's forest today may be found in the Upper Peninsula tomorrow; and

WHEREAS, baiting limits enacted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) are impossible to enforce with the violation rate being high throughout the state; and

WHEREAS, bait stations become gathering spots that help facilitate the transmission of communicable diseases, such as Bovine Tuberculosis and CWD.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that MUCC be on record as opposing the continued use of bait as a means of harvesting whitetail in Michigan.

DEER BAITING [BAN STATEWIDE] (2003)

WHEREAS, the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) passed a resolution at its 2000 annual convention asking for a complete ban on the practice of deer baiting and feeding in the lower peninsula, and current MUCC Policy supports limiting baiting to (2) five gallon containers, an amount which exceeds current (2002-03) regulations, and

WHEREAS, since this resolution passed in 2000, the state of Wisconsin has discovered Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in its free ranging whitetail herd, and

WHEREAS, Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP) shares a border with Wisconsin and a deer wandering Wisconsin's forest today may be found in the UP tomorrow, and

WHEREAS, baiting limits enacted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) are hard to enforce with the violation rate being high throughout the state, and

WHEREAS, bait/feed stations become gathering spots that help facilitate the transmission of communicable diseases such as Bovine Tuberculosis and CWD, now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Michigan United Conservation Clubs be on record as opposing the continued use of bait as a means of harvesting whitetails in Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that MUCC work with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to end the practice of baiting/feeding in the entire state of Michigan.